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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000467

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TAGS: [OSCE](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: PATRIARCHATE FEELS SECURE BUT DEFENSIVE

REF: ISTANBUL 464

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL SHARON A. WIENER FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Ecumenical Patriarchate's press and public relations representative Father Dositheos told poloff on December 23 that while they are hard-pressed to explain the Patriarch's controversial use of the term "to feel crucified" in the "60 Minutes" program aired on December 20, the Patriarchate has no heightened concerns for security. The Patriarch has been provided additional security from the Ministry of Interior. The Patriarchate's communication with the GOT has been limited to public statements from various ministers and the Prime Minister and the Patriarch has not spoken directly to the Prime Minister since the August 15 Buyukada lunch. The correspondence representatives and lawyer for the Patriarchate said the Patriarch would not be issuing a public statement; however, he has since done an extensive interview with daily "Milliyet" published on December 24. Dositheos expressed relief that the media "is calmer than we had anticipated" following the release of the program. He also suggested that the Patriarch's statements are not likely to have any impact on the GOT's speed in reopening Halki. End Summary.

Security Situation

¶2. (SBU) Father Dositheos stressed that presently the Patriarchate does not feel heightened security concerns and has not received threats after the Patriarch's controversial use of the term "to feel crucified" in the "60 Minutes" program aired on December 20th (Ref A). The program was filmed in April, June, August, and October. As reported by the Patriarchate's lawyer on December 20, Dositheos reconfirmed that the Patriarchate has not contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Ministry of Interior for additional security nor has the MFA or MOI contacted them. (NOTE: According to our regional security office contact at the Patriarchate, after December 20, the MOI assigned a follow car and four additional Turkish National Police officers to the Patriarch's security detail. The Patriarch uses an armored vehicle and was previously assigned one TNP body guard. The three TNP officers assigned to the Patriarchate carry pistols and MP-5 submachine guns. According to information gained from the Patriarchate, the submachine guns are generally kept out of sight. Istanbul RSO provides basic security training twice a year to the Patriarchate as part of an effort to improve general security awareness. The next training is scheduled for early 2010. END NOTE.)

Limited Communication with the GOT

13. (SBU) Contrary to some press reporting on Prime Minister Erdogan's December 22 public statements, Dositheos said that the last time the Patriarch and Erdogan spoke was August 15 on Buyukada. With regard to the statements made by GOT ministers, Dositheos found Erdogan's December 22 statement to be logical and normal while FM Davutoglu's was defensive. When asked why FM Davutoglu was the first GOT official to make a statement on the subject, Dositheos said he, too, found it strange. He thought Minister of Interior Atalay would have been a more appropriate person to comment. Reserving the first response for the MFA, Dositheos asserted, further emphasized the fact that the Greek Orthodox population in Turkey is considered foreign and second class. (NOTE: We are skeptical that the GOT "reserves" its comments in advance. Davutoglu was probably first because reporters got to him first, but this is also of significance. END NOTE)

Reaction to the Media Response

14. (SBU) Dositheos expressed relief that the media "is calmer than we had anticipated" following the release of the program. He said that while they were unaware of how "60 Minutes" would frame the topic, the Patriarchate had anticipated even harsher responses to "Bartholomew saying the truth."

15. (SBU) Dositheos and his Greek American interpreter both said no one had a second thought about the expression "to be crucified" because it is so commonly used among the Greek

ISTANBUL 00000467 002 OF 002

population. He blamed much of this on bad translation. He said the Turkish version used should not have been "armiha gerilmek" (to be crucified) but instead the more commonly used "ile ekmek, isterap ekmek" (to suffer an ordeal) because it would have more accurately reflected the the weight of term.

16. (SBU) Despite initial statements from the Patriarchate's lawyer that the Patriarch would make a clarifying statement on December 21 or December 22, representatives from the Patriarchate have since recanted. The Patriarch does not plan to issue a public statement. Instead, the the Patriarchate distributed a press release on December 23 explaining the use of the term "to feel crucified" and the need for further democratization in Turkey and the Patriarch agreed to an interview with daily "Milliyet" published on December 24.

17. (U) Asli Aydintasbas of "Milliyet" spoke at length with the Patriarch and the extensive interview was featured as the daily's December 24 cover story. The Patriarch used the opportunity as a platform to address the need to open Halki in order to educate clergy who were raised in Turkey and have an appreciation for the country. (NOTE: At this time there are only 230 school-aged Greek Orthodox Turkish citizens attending Greek Orthodox schools in Turkey. END NOTE.) He accused the "deep state" of having unfairly closed the seminary and kept it closed, despite the GOT's interest in opening it. The Patriarch stressed that as Turkish citizens, the Greek Orthodox want their rights to be respected and this includes the opening of Halki, whether as a university or a school. He insisted that their rights as Turkish citizens should not be held hostage to the solution of problems in Cyprus or Thrace. With regard to the phrase the Patriarch used during his interview on CBS's "60 Minutes" he explained that the term "crucified" was meant to express his worries and hardships. The Patriarch said he initially refused the interview with CBS but later, with pressure from the Greek Orthodox Diaspora in the United States, accepted it.

Potential Impact on Halki Reopening

¶8. (SBU) The Patriarch's statements are not likely to have any impact on the GOT's speed in reopening Halki, Dositheos posited. Statements such as that given by the Patriarch often have a negative effect, he said, but the GOT could not be moving any slower so the speed will not be affected. Additionally, Dositheos said that if the GOT were to announce that it stopped the process entirely it would show that it was offended by the statements.

¶9. (C) Comment: While it is true that the Patriarch's statements, and "Milliyet" interview have generated more media coverage of the genuine complaints of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and population in Turkey than even President Obama's mention of Halki seminary in his speech to the TBMM in April, Father Dositheos' assessment of the unlikelihood of negative fallout with the GOT may be unrealistically optimistic. Dositheos' point about the symbolism of the MFA's making the first statement is legitimate commentary on the GOT's approach to the Greek Orthodox minority. End Comment.
WIENER